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ABSTRACT

One of a series designed to assist schools and communities in facilitating children's success in school, this packet provides an overview of some of the issues concerning the early identification and treatment of young children at risk of failing in school, and profiles 16 model programs for students from prekindergarten to third grade. Sections of the packet provide: (1) a brief overview of the issues; (2) a descriptive sampling of programs and practices; and (3) a four-page bibliography of selected resources on early identification and intervention. Contents emphasize approaches that begin early and involve parents, rather than exclusively compensatory programs. Programs described are those that have demonstrated progress with youth of diverse cultural backgrounds or limited English speaking skills. Each profile includes the name, institutional affiliation, address, and telephone number of a contact person. (RH)

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GOOD BEGINNINGS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH-RISK YOUTH

AND PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

Janet M. Phlegar

1987

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JMP

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GOOD BEGINNINGS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN: EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH-RISK YOUTH AND PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

This packet gives an overview of some of the issues surrounding the early identification and treatment of youth at risk of failing to be successful in school. It surveys some of the available resources that can be used with students from pre-kindergarten to grade 3, with some extension to older elementary school youth. The packet contains three sections:

- A brief overview of the issues
- A sampling of programs and practices
- A bibliography

A variety of researchers and practitioners with different areas of interest have contributed to the growing body of knowledge and understanding about the practices and effects of intervening early to help all children succeed in school. Research and practice in early childhood education in general provides the foundation on which others depend when they examine what happens to at-risk children in the early years.

This packet emphasizes approaches that involve parents and start early rather than those that rely only upon compensatory programs. Moreover, it describes models that demonstrate progress with youth of diverse cultural backgrounds and/or limited English speaking skills. In addition, it suggests some special education programs that offer identification, planning, and teaching strategies that may provide ideas that can spark the interest in learning shared by all children.

From these different points of emphasis, the packet pulls together a cross-section of resources aimed at helping communities develop strategies to 1) identify youth at risk during the earliest phases of schooling and 2) intervene with appropriate programs to help all children succeed in school.

Though all students have relative strengths and weaknesses as learners, it is essential to emphasize the importance of affirmations. Instead of deficit curricula, programs that identify each student's most absorbing interests will succeed in engaging them as autonomous learners over the long run.

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 290 South Main Street, Andover, MA 01810

OVERVIEW

Research shows that by the end of the third grade it is possible to predict which students will eventually drop out of school. Maximum benefit can be gained by assisting those students during the earliest possible points in school. Some of the issues to be considered in trying to identify these at-risk youth and support their success are outlined here. Although each issue is complex and many are surrounded by controversy, the discussion below outlines each topic and does not attempt a comprehensive discussion.

I. Research on dropouts has identified individual characteristics of those who eventually drop out of school. While this list is constantly being refined and differs depending on point of origin, the characteristics cited are more alike than different. These characteristics include

- academic (being retained in grade or being a year older than others in the same grade)
- school/social (attendance problem, discipline problem)
- home/family (lower socio-economic background, minority, limited English proficient, single parent or other unstable home factor, little value placed on completion of school)
- personal (negative self-concept, drug/alcohol abuse, pregnant or parenting teen)

Many of the characteristics in these categories are observable in children as they enter school. Some method of tracking these children's progress in school should be established and appropriate interventions designed as needed.

II. Demographic changes increase the need for early childhood education programs.

Drastic demographic changes have contributed to increased numbers of students who exhibit some of the above characteristics. More young children today come from homes with two working parents or live in households with only one parent or with parents who are still children themselves. Forty percent of all identified poor persons in the U.S. are children, although children make up only 27 percent of the total population (Moynihan, 1986). Blacks and Hispanics comprise a disproportionate share of those below the poverty line.

As Ernest Boyer points out in his article "Early Schooling and the Nation's Future," (Educational Leadership 1987), poverty and schooling are connected. Our educational problems cannot be divorced from the problems of the poor. This means expanding nutritional programs for expectant mothers and young children. In addition, Boyer recommends responding to

other demographic factors by adjusting the school schedule and calendar to changing family and work patterns.

III. High quality early childhood programs have long-term, positive impact on participants' school performance and socio-emotional behavior. In addition, those children most in need seem to benefit most.

The recent national literature on the effects of early childhood programs, including Head Start, supports using early identification and intervention strategies with children deemed at risk of failing in school. Questions persist over structure of the intervention, reliability of identification systems, compatibility or duplication of special education services, and optimal time (age or stage of development) to intervene.

IV. Effective early childhood curriculum and intervention programs meet social and emotional needs as well as learning styles.

Research generally supports the notion that early childhood education curriculum should begin with heavy emphasis on the experiential and proceed to more formal and abstract tasks. The timing and rate of this transition are in debate.

One recommendation is to give top priority in early education, pre-K through 3, to language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) to ensure that all students have a solid foundation from which to pursue a common core of learning in years following.

Other recommendations focus on students' social skills. An important consideration is that all learning is based on sound socio-emotional development. How children feel about themselves and others provides the foundation for future learning. Emotional aspects of learning need to be understood and incorporated in early childhood programs. Children intuitively remember the feel of good (and bad) events, which affects their later learnings.

Another subject in this topic area concerns the availability of universal kindergarten as well as the expense and desirability of widespread pre-kindergarten.

V. Parental involvement is a critical factor in the educational success of young children.

School systems must learn to integrate and engage parents in a variety of active and/or informal ways. By exploring how to tap and develop the parents' expressed interest in their own personal growth, school systems can also assist parents in understanding better how their children can be supported to grow and learn, too.

VI. Small class size and reduced adult/child ratio can improve effectiveness of early education.

Although research on class size has sparked controversy, small class size (22 students or less) appears to promote increased academic achievement in grades pre-K to 3. Another important factor is the quality of the relationships between the adults and children.

Moreover, learning is most effective when teachers adapt their instructional methods and procedures to the smaller class size. Other critical factors affecting student achievement include type of students, teaching styles and methods, and the availability of resources and support.

VII. Early childhood researchers agree that staffing is the single most important factor in delivering quality early childhood education.

Three-fourths of all states require no specialized training or licensing for early childhood educators. In order to improve this situation teachers working with preschool children need ongoing staff development opportunities so as to gain and refine skills in observation, non-judgmental recording, and personalized planning based on these practices. Practicing these crafts will enhance and enrich the learning environment.

VIII. A comprehensive approach to the whole child is needed.

Children cannot learn effectively unless physical, emotional, and social needs are met. Schools, communities, and social service agencies need to work together to ensure that each child develops physically, emotionally, and socially, as well as intellectually.

IX. The question of how to assist at-risk youth through early identification and appropriate programs must be continually informed by the ongoing study of how different children learn best.

Boyer (1987) calls for us to become more knowledgeable about how we can assess the potential of all children and to define more broadly our definition of potential.

This outline does not deal with some of the specific issues that are parts of larger questions such as:

- Should a school socially promote or retain in grade a student not developmentally ready for the first (or other) grade?
- Are pre-K and pre-one transitional grades effective ways of allowing developmentally-delayed children to succeed in school?

- What is the cost benefit of intervening in the early years? And what are the comparative rates of effectiveness for early vs. later intervention?

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New York State Regents/Commissioner's Regional Conferences Discussion Guide, Education Success for All: Better Beginnings -- Stronger Completions, 1986, 1-9.

PROMISING PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

The following programs come from a variety of sources: the catalogue of the National Diffusion Network (NDN), Education Programs That Work; The High Risk Youth Dropout Prevention and Recovery Model Program of the California Department of Education; and recommendations of field staff. Although all of the programs may not have been validated (as those in the NDN are), each has been selected because it promises to help educators act effectively now to increase chances of school success.

Accelerated Schools. Transitional elementary schools designed to bring disadvantaged students up to grade level by the end of sixth grade so that they can take advantage of mainstream secondary school instruction.

This approach is characterized by assessment of a student's ability at school entry, the setting of objectives, and periodic evaluation. The curriculum emphasizes language arts, applying learnings to every day problems, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, parent involvement, and an option of an extended day with additional offerings.

CONTACT: Henry M. Levin
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Stanford, CA 94305

Books and Beyond. A program that improves the reading skills of students by motivating them to read more and watch TV less. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

Books and Beyond produces positive changes through incentives to read more outside of school. Success for diverse participants is assured by a self-pacing, individualized approach. Using parent education and student self-monitoring techniques, participants become more aware of their TV viewing habits and more discriminating in their allocation of time between recreational reading and television viewing.

Participants in the Books and Beyond Program demonstrated significant gains in reading achievement when compared with a control group study as measured by the CTBS Reading Test.

CONTACT: Ellie Topolovac, Project Director or
Ann Collins, Coordinator
Solana Beach School District
309 North Rios Street
Solana Beach, CA 92075
(619) 755-6319

Good Beginnings for Young Children, The Regional Laboratory

Early Prevention of School Failure. A program designed to prevent school failure by identifying the developmental levels and learning styles of children ages four to six years. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

Early Prevention of School Failure has demonstrated that effective screening and diagnostic and classroom techniques can identify, remediate, and ameliorate developmental delays, problems, or deviations in gross and fine motor skills that could adversely affect future school performance.

The training provides professional assistance to teachers so that they may acquire skills and competencies in matching curriculum to levels of development. The screening process evaluates the whole child through analyzing his/her modality development. A computer program simplifies the conferencing process to provide teachers and parents with an individual student profile. In addition, the computer program groups the children according to need so that the teacher can plan the 15-20 minutes of daily modality instruction appropriately. The EPSF program materials include screening instruments, classroom management guides, classroom activity guides, parent materials, and literature folders for teaching the high process thinking skills.

Early Prevention of School Failure is being used with children whose first language is English, Spanish, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese.

CONTACT: Luceille Werner, Project Director
Peotone School District 207-U
114 N. Second Street
Peotone, IL 60468
(312)258-3478

Early Success in School -- K-3. A program that emphasizes the prevention of early school failure rather than just its remediation.

Early Success in School focuses on expanding kindergarten and first grade curriculum to provide classroom activities that foster children's thinking skills and allow the children to develop more positive attitudes towards themselves and their school work. Early Success in School was featured at the Sharing Educational Success Travelling Seminars in 1982.

CONTACT: Sharon Andrade
580 East 4th Street
Chico, CA 95926
(916) 891-1695

Growing Healthy. (Incorporating the Primary Grades Health Curriculum Project and the School Health Curriculum Project). A comprehensive health education program designed to foster student competencies to make decisions enhancing their health and lives. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

Growing Healthy includes a planned sequential curriculum, a variety of teaching methods, a teacher training program, and strategies for eliciting community support for school health education. It involves students,

teachers, educational administrators, other school staff, community health personnel, and the families of participating students. Through group and individual activities, children learn about themselves by learning about their bodies. There is one 8-12 week unit for grades K through 6 and a semester course for grade 7. Each grade studies a separate unit specifically designed for that age group.

Throughout all grades health information about safety, nutrition, environment, drugs and alcohol, hygiene, fitness, mental health, disease prevention, consumer health wellness, and lifestyle is explored and reinforced. Access to a variety of stimulating learning resources including audiovisuals, models, community health workers, and reading materials, is provided. The curriculum is designed to integrate with the lives of personality development of children by providing situations in which they may assume responsibility, research ideas, share knowledge, discuss values, make decisions, and create activities to illustrate their comprehension and internalization of other subjects. The teacher uses a learning center approach, which allows children to move about the room, explore resources, and work together in groups.

Twenty-four separate studies were completed between 1964 and 1978 to ascertain effectiveness. A recent review and synthesis of these studies indicates that Growing Healthy was effective in increasing health-related knowledge and providing positive health-related attitudes.

CONTACT: Betty Spectorman
Director, School Health Programs
National Center for Health Education
30 East 29 Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 689-1886

High/Scope. A preschool program with the designated purpose of mainstreaming mildly and moderately handicapped children with nonhandicapped children. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum is an open-framework model derived from Piagetian theory. Through designated key experiences for children, teaching and parenting strategies, and child-observation materials, the curriculum provides a decision-making framework. Within this framework, teachers design a classroom program that reflects the expressed needs and interests of the children being served.

This approach emphasizes the identification of the child's status on a developmental continuum by examining his/her strengths and accomplishments. The project views discrepancies in behavior between handicapped and nonhandicapped age peers as developmental delays, not as deficiencies. Basing their tasks on this orientation, teachers initiate developmentally appropriate experiences in the classroom that reflect the basic long-range goals of the program. These goals are: to develop children's ability to use a variety of skills in the arts and physical movement; to develop their knowledge of objects as a base of educational concept; to develop their

ability to speak, dramatize, and graphically represent their experiences and communicate these experiences to other children and adults; to develop their ability to work with others, make decisions about what to do and how to do it, and plan their use of time and energy; and to develop their ability to apply their newly acquired reasoning capacity in a wide range of naturally occurring situations and with a variety of materials. The teacher's role is to support the children's decisions and encourage them to extend learning beyond the original plan.

CONTACT: Clay Shouse, Manager
Development & Services
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(313) 485-2000

HOSTS Math: Help One Student to Succeed. A diagnostic/prescriptive/tutorial approach designed for students with remediation needs in the mathematical skills of concept development, computation, and application. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

HOSTS Math is a mastery learning model; however, HOSTS Math's flexibility allows it to be used in a regular classroom as well as in a compensatory setting. Students are carefully placed in a precise sequence of math skills and progress from one skill to the next as mastery is demonstrated. Teachers are provided lesson plans that emphasize the manipulative, representational, symbolic approach to learning. Small group and/or one-to-one tutoring is used to remediate the deficiencies identified by the teacher. Assessment, record keeping, and review of materials are integral parts of the program available in paper and/or computerized format. HOSTS Math has been designated as a LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT by the U.S. Department of Education for its use of computer technology in improving student performance.

A computerized version of HOSTS Math is available. There is also a HOSTS reading program.

CONTACT: William E. Gibbons, President
HOSTS Corporation
1801 "D" Street, Suite 2
Vancouver, WA 98663
(206) 694-1705

Instructional Risk Reduction Program: A Long Range Solution to California's High School Dropout Problem. A service to improve instruction at the elementary school level through the identification of the factors in an instruction program that may result in potential or future dropouts.

The Instructional Risk Reduction Program provides for an analysis and identification of problem areas in program instruction and provides for seminars, workshops, and individualized assistance to reduce these risks. Staff development of the elementary school personnel is a part of the

program. Services provided are tailored to the needs of requesting schools. Emphasis is placed on the effective teaching of critical skills that are the foundation of future learning.

CONTACT: Dr. Carol Thomas
SWRL
4665 Lampson Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
(213) 598-7661

Kenosha Model: Academic Improvement Through Language Experience. An individualized program to improve communication skills utilizing the language experience approach. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

In the Kenosha (WI) school district that originated the Kenosha Model, public and nonpublic school classroom teachers refer low-achieving students to the Chapter I resource room for individual assessment. Following the educational assessment, the resource teacher selects those students with the greatest need. A Personalized Performance Plan is developed that considers the area of deficiency, the student's learning style, and the instructional techniques to be followed in correcting the deficiency. The plan is flexible and can be modified as the needs of the student change. The language experience approach to instruction is used. Instruction follows the assumption that students can speak about that which they have experienced, write about that which they have spoken, and read about that which they have written. Student authorship at all grade levels in requisite. At the parent project, a teacher and two aides serve each resource room. Instruction is individualized and takes place in small groups. This project serves approximately 1,200 students during the school year. Intensive inservice and parent participation are essential components of this program.

The model has been proven to be effective for limited English proficient students as well as the Chapter I target population. The approach is also used successfully to supplement the standard text in many reading/language arts programs.

CONTACT: Tom Zuhlke, Program Director
Kenosha Unified School District
3600 52nd Street
Kenosha, WI 53142
(414) 656-6378

The ME-ME Drug Prevention Education Program. A drug prevention education program aimed at improving self-concepts. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

The ME-ME Program was developed to improve those conditions that seem to be common to most young people who abuse drugs and alcohol and is based on the premise that if these conditions can be dealt with early, children will have less need to turn to drugs. The ultimate goal of the ME-ME Program is to help children develop to their potential. This is accomplished by

providing activities that enhance children's self-concepts and give them the skills necessary to make decisions. Peer pressure is dealt with by presenting students with situations where they must decide whether to go along with their friends or with their own instincts. Children start out making simple decisions. As they progress through the grades, their decisions become more difficult. Drug information is taught in conjunction with children learning about themselves and how to make decisions.

The regular classroom teacher presents the program to children. Teaching strategies encourage positive feelings between students and teacher. The materials are student-oriented and are compatible with all areas of the curriculum. Although some of the activities can be used with all elementary level children, each grade level has activities that are unique to itself. Grade level activities are arranged in the proper sequence to assure that the continuity of the program is maintained. Training consists of a one-day training session conducted by project staff or a designated trainer. The materials and inservice training enable any teacher to effectively implement this program in the classroom. Use of the program is monitored by the project staff throughout the first year of implementation.

Pretests and posttests have been administered to experimental and control groups with matching socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds and ability levels. The project has proven that it increases students' feelings of self-worth, decision-making ability, and factual information about drugs. There has been evidence of little drug abuse in schools where the program has been implemented. Discipline problems are fewer in classrooms where the program is being used.

CONTACT: Artie Kearney, Ph.D., Executive Director
ME-ME Inc.
426 W. College Ave.
Appleton, WI 54911
(414) 735-0114

The Portage Project: A Home Approach to the Early Education of Young Children. A home-based model serving multicategorical handicapped children from birth to six years of age. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

The Portage Project uses the precision teaching methodology to deliver comprehensive, data-based, parent teaching services. The model, whether employed totally in the home or in a classroom-home combination program, centers on a home teacher working with parents on a weekly basis to assess, plan, and teach developmental skills.

Parents observe and practice weekly teaching activities with the guidance and support of a home teacher. Activities are individually designed to meet the developmental needs of the child and the desires, interests, and cultural mores of the family. The home teacher and parent discuss and choose long- and short-term goals for the child and then develop the appropriate teaching sequences to reach those goals. Child progress is recorded weekly and activities are modified when necessary to assure that the child is consistently reaching the goals set.

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CONTACT: George Jesien, Outreach Director
Portage Project
626 E. Slifer Street
Portage, WI 53901
(608) 742-8811

Project FREE. A program designed to supplement the educational experience and personal development of young school children (Developed under a Department of Mental Health grant).

Project FREE features early detection and immediate intervention of behavioral, emotional, or social difficulties. Its goals are: a) to help children get a good start in school by fostering a healthy self-concept, developing their social skills, and helping them bring their school work up to potential; b) to prevent the need for more specialized or "crisis" help at a later date; c) to identify children's individual needs early so that the school can plan an educational program that will be beneficial to each child; and d) to guide parents in understanding their child.

CONTACT: Beverly Curtis
Project FREE
Alta Vista Elementary School
173 Oak Street
Auburn, CA 95603
(916) 885-1927

Project NET (Network to End Truancy). A network aimed at improving the capability of local school systems to develop effective strategies for truancy/dropout prevention and intervention.

Project NET is a Connecticut-wide project utilizing five regional education service centers (RESCs) and the Wheeler Clinic to develop a multi-agency, multi-level (state, regional, local) network. Resource materials and technical assistance for self-assessment, inservice training, grant preparation and other activities are available at each regional site. Regional and statewide conferences feature model programs and approaches.

CONTACT: Joan Abeshouse Grossman
Cooperative Educational Services
785 Unquowa Road
Fairfield, CT 06430

Rhode Island Department of Education K-3 Literacy Project. A state-mandated program to focus on literacy skills in the early grades.

The State of Rhode Island has mandated through the passage of The Literacy and Dropout Prevention Act of 1987 that all schools in the state adopt a K-3 literacy-based curriculum. All teachers and students in grades K-3 would focus on reading, writing, listening, speaking, and basic numeracy. Concepts from social studies and science would be integrated into the curriculum. The goal is to have all students literate by grade three. The

program is in the developmental stages, with four districts working on the conceptual framework and plans for implementation.

CONTACT: Dr. Marie DiBiasio
Rhode Island Department of Education
School Services Division
22 Hayes Street
Providence, RI 02908

Strategies in Early Childhood Education. A continuous-growth program with sequential program materials that bridges the gap between preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

The concepts of the project are three: 1) A child must have basic processes developed to a certain level before terminal objectives such as reading and math can be taught effectively and meaningfully, because failure to take development issues into account results in failure and/or meaningless rote learning. 2) There must be an assessment of where the child is developmentally in terms of learning processes and structural analysis. 3) Once an assessment is made, an educational program based upon the pupil's strengths must be outlined in each skill area, and this program must utilize the child's mode and rate of learning so that continuous progress is possible.

Based upon these concepts, the project includes the following components: a model including the structural, functional, behavioral, and environmental components of children as they develop from age 4 to about age 8; a chart of learning objectives as related to the model; a screening manual and a pupil edition; a class record chart to record each student's starting point as indicated by the screening and to map his or her continuous progress; a prescription guide, which includes each educational objective stated on the scope and sequence chart; and a list of activities for each objective to assist the teacher in providing appropriate learning experiences for each pupil.

Program objectives are developmentally outlined, and activities and learning centers are established to enhance auditory, visual, motor, and verbal language skills leading to reading, math, and language growth.

CONTACT: Robert Schramm, Project Director
P.O. Box 208
Juneau, WI 53039
(414) 386-2955

Talents Unlimited. A structured attempt to apply a multiple-talent theory approach to the regular classroom situation. (A National Diffusion Network Program)

Talents Unlimited is designed to help teachers recognize and nurture multiple talents in children of varying ability levels, including talents in the areas of productive thinking, communication, forecasting, decision making, and planning, as well as in the academic areas. The program is a

structured attempt to implement and evaluate at the elementary classroom level the multiple-talent theory as defined by Dr. Calvin Taylor; it is based on sound educational and psychological research in learning. Replicable models for teacher training, student instruction, and evaluation have been developed. The program can operate within any organizational pattern.

The Talents Unlimited process model focuses on regular classroom instructional programs, not on gifted programs per se.

CONTACT: Florence Replogle
Talents Unlimited
1107 Arlington St.
Mobile, AL 36605
(205) 690-8060

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